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ABSTRACT

Certain general principles, attitudes, and practices applicable to the evaluation and recognition of performance are presented. The six basic steps in performance evaluation are: (1) Prepare performance requirements; (2) Discuss the requirements with the employee; (3) Observe what he is doing; (4) Evaluate his performance against the requirements; (5) Discuss the evaluation with the employee; and (6) Take appropriate action. (CK)

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VA PAMPHLET 05-29 (Revised)

Common Sense About Evaluating and Recognizing Performance

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION
Washington, D.C. 20420

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The purpose of this pamphlet is to discuss certain general principles, attitudes, and practices applicable to the evaluation and recognition of performance. Details as to policies and procedures are to be found in the appropriate chapters of VA Manual, MP-5, *which should be consulted and followed closely.*

Rescission: VA Pamphlet 5-29, March 1960.

TM 003 278

COMMON SENSE ABOUT EVALUATING AND RECOGNIZING PERFORMANCE

Mr. Supervisor, your employees share a common desire to have a more complete and accurate answer to the question:

HOW AM I DOING?

They want to know what is expected of them, how well they are meeting these expectations, how they can improve, and how they might qualify for higher responsibilities.

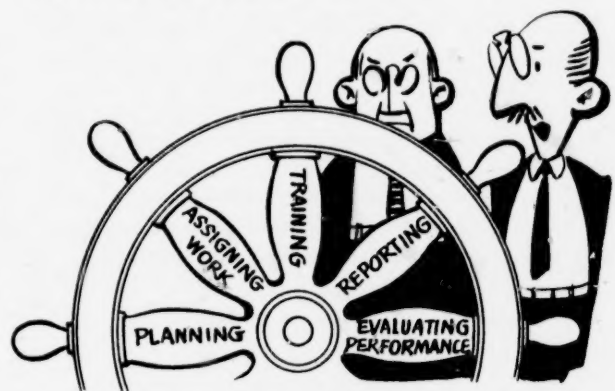
As a supervisor your main job is to see that the mission of your unit, section, division, or service is accomplished. It seems trite to mention this, but the mission is the hub to which the spokes of all your duties are connected. *You* are interested in the question:

HOW ARE WE DOING?

You can find out the answer to both of these questions by determining the contribution of each employee to

the total output. In other words, you can get these answers by carrying out your responsibility for . . .

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

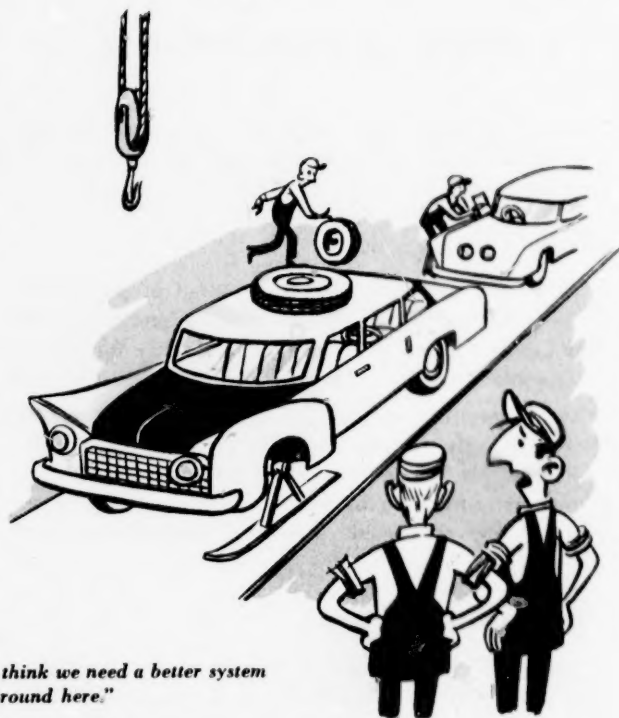


Every spoke is needed to steer the good ship "Effective Supervision."

WHAT IS IT?

Performance evaluation is the appraisal of an employee's performance against the performance requirements for his position. It represents your best judgment as to how well the employee does his job and as to what possibilities he has for improvement and advancement.

More of this later, but right now you are probably groaning and saying, "Oh, no! The poor supervisor has to do everything. Everybody makes plans and then I've got to carry them out." Like so many other things, evaluating performance is part and parcel of your job and is something that you do in the natural course of events. The important thing is to do it in a *systematic and planned fashion* so that it will help you, your employees, and the situation.



"I'm beginning to think we need a better system around here."

IT CAN HELP YOU

There are many ways in which performance evaluation can assist you. For example, it can help you to—

1. Let your employees know what is expected of them and how well they are meeting these expectations;
2. Plan the work of your unit better through being able to estimate more accurately what your employees can do;
3. Determine training needs and the causes for them;
4. Identify employees who are best qualified for promotion;
5. Obtain an understanding of each employee's strong points and the areas in which he can be improved;
6. Develop plans to make more use of these strong points and to improve performance;
7. Discover potential not being used and to formulate plans for developing and using this potential;
8. Recognize performance which is above standard and reward it appropriately;
9. Make "Acceptable Level of Competence" determinations;
10. Recognize employees who are unwilling or unable to perform satisfactorily in their current assignments and collect information on which to base action.

IT CAN HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES

The items on the preceding page also help your employees. Yes, even the last one. For example, if you spot an employee whose performance isn't satisfactory, you may be able to help him to come up to par or may try to put him where he can do a satisfactory job. But most of all performance evaluation motivates employees by—

1. Letting them know how they are doing and how they can do better;
2. Assuring them that their work will be evaluated in a fair and equitable manner;
3. Convincing them that poor performance will be spotted and good performance will be recognized; and
4. Showing them that you and management are interested in helping them improve their performance and in developing what potential they have.

Don't forget, also, that you're on the receiving end when your boss is evaluating YOUR performance.



***"Yes, sir. You get your 'Supervisor' hat here.
But you can't turn in your 'Employee' hat."***

WHAT ARE THE STEPS?

Here is Mr. Common Sense to show you the six basic steps in performance evaluation:



1 Prepare performance requirements. In other words, determine how well you expect the employee to do his duties.

2 Discuss the performance requirements with the employee and adjust them as needed.

3 Observe what he is doing.

4 Evaluate his performance against the requirements.

5 Discuss the evaluation with the employee.

6 Take appropriate action.

STEP 1

PREPARE PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS



"Oh, yes, we have definite standards for the position. I don't know what they are, but don't worry, Miss Tomkins; you meet them."

Before you can evaluate anything, you must have standards by which to measure it. Before you can evaluate how well one of your employees is doing his job, you must first determine the essential requirements of the job. These are the performance requirements we mentioned before.

Performance requirements describe the QUANTITY, QUALITY, TIMELINESS, and the MANNER OF PERFORMANCE necessary to accomplish a job satisfactorily. They are not the same as job descriptions, which broadly outline the duties and responsibilities of a job. Performance requirements establish HOW the principal work activities necessary to carry out the general duties and responsibilities will be accomplished. They tell how much work must be done and how well it must be done.

They may be put in writing or established orally. Generally, *written* requirements turn out to be more useful. In any event, the important thing is to make sure that they are made known to the employee and that there is mutual understanding as to what is expected from him.

WHY DO WE HAVE PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS?

Performance requirements are useful in many ways. They lead to:

- *Better Evaluations.* They provide objective standards for measuring individual performance.
- *Improved Performance.* They provide both you and your employee with a definite understanding of what is required on the job. Therefore, the employee can strive to meet and exceed such requirements in his daily work. Weaknesses in performance can be more readily detected and eliminated with your help.
- *Better Job Relations.* They show the employee that evaluations are made on the basis of impersonal and objective standards. They assist in gaining credit for the employee for fully satisfactory or outstanding performance. They make it clear that his weaknesses are noted on a factual basis, and they give him insight on how to improve himself in his job.
- *Better Determination of Training Needs.* They assist you to determine the kind and amount of training needed by employees who are not responding to their jobs. They are also useful for instructing new employees.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS?



"I don't think it's supposed to look like that."

They may be developed according to the elements of performance pertinent to the job (skill, accuracy, productivity, supervision, etc.), or according to the tasks of a job (typing, filing, making up a bed, developing manual instructions, etc.).

But just how do you go about it? Let's illustrate by applying the element approach to a familiar job, that of babysitter. Many of us have been a babysitter or have hired one. What might be some pertinent elements for this particular job, and what are some of the standards we might set under these elements?

Knowledge of Work. Taking this as the first element, the sitter knows how to read to or otherwise amuse older children. She knows how to feed and change babies.

Accuracy. She is careful when feeding children to give the correct food in the correct amounts.



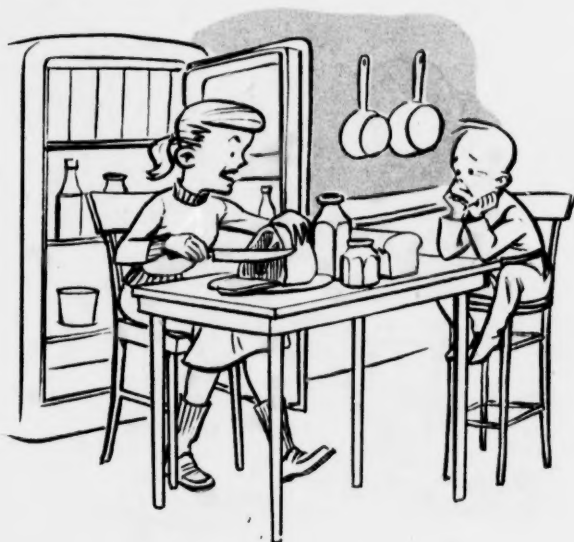
"If you're hungry, eat this.
It's good for you."

Skill. The sitter is able to get the children to follow her instructions. She doesn't allow them to take advantage of the parents' absence.



"You untie me, or your parents will think
I can't control you."

Cooperation. She is reasonable about invitations to have a snack and doesn't go through the refrigerator like a horde of 7-year locusts.



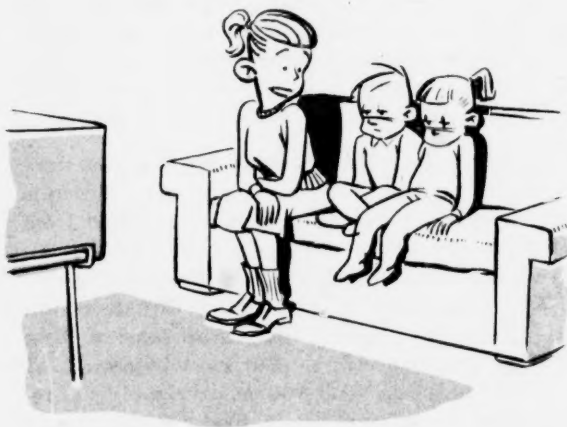
"Now you sit quietly, while I have a little snack."

Interest in Work. The sitter pays attention to her work. She doesn't spend all her time on the phone and doesn't invite her chums in for a party.



"I'm glad I could babysit tonight. My parents would never stand for all this noise."

Dependability. She arrives no later than a few minutes after the agreed time. She does *not* leave while sitting or before the parents return home. She gets the children to bed at the regular time.



"Are you sure your parents let you watch the 'Late, Late Show'?"

Judgment. The sitter can distinguish a minor matter which she can handle—for example, crying caused by a need for a change—from emergencies which require her to call the parents—for example, crying caused by a fever.



"He must be ill, Mrs. Young. He went right to bed without fussing."

STEP 2

DISCUSS THE PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS WITH THE EMPLOYEE



Once you have made up your mind tentatively as to the correct and fair requirements of the job, you should discuss them with your superior and then with the employee concerned. After these preliminary discussions, modify the requirements, if necessary, discuss them more fully with the employee, and strive for his full acceptance and compliance on the job.

Of course, the final determination lies with you, since you are responsible for production and, therefore, must decide what can reasonably be expected from each employee. However, participation by the employee in the development of the requirements is very helpful. After all, he is more familiar with the details of the job. You probably don't know some of them and have forgotten others. But most important—if the employee works with you in developing the requirements, he is much more likely to understand them, accept them, and use them.

STEP 3 | OBSERVE WHAT HE IS DOING

Performance evaluation is a continuing day-to-day responsibility and not something you can put off until you're asked to do it. In your daily contacts with employees you should observe their performance and take note of situations that call for more than normal attention. This would include such things as:

- Significant instances of commendable or weak performance.
- Inability to perform certain tasks acceptably, indicating need for further instruction.

In some instances you could keep only an informal record, as for example when the information is of limited or temporary use. In others it would be appropriate to furnish a notation or memorandum to your superiors, as for example when the information is of long-range value. You should also inform the employee of what is done.



STEP 4 | EVALUATE PERFORMANCE

In evaluating employee performance you make a comparison between what you have determined are the standards for satisfactory performance on the job and what you have observed about the employee's performance. The facts you have gathered about the work should give you a pretty good picture of what the employee is doing. Likewise, the facts about the job will give you an equally clear picture of what you should reasonably expect of any qualified employee. Comparing the two sets of facts point by point will help you to decide how well he has met the requirements. Of course, the requirements you use should be those in effect and known to the employee at the time the performance was rendered, and which he had a fair opportunity to meet.

There are certain factors which, consciously or unconsciously, may tend to influence your judgment. They

are difficult to overcome, but you should try to eliminate them from consideration. Some of them are—

- Prejudices and partialities. Appearance, sex, age, personal likes and dislikes, etc.
- *Spot performances.* Single instances of exceptional activity, especially the *recent* instances, and rare errors which tend to overshadow the true performance.
- Unwillingness to make an unfavorable evaluation.
- *Hurry.* Failure to take time to do a thorough job.
- Inadequate or incorrect information or failure to get all the essential facts.
- Influence of length of service or grade of employee.

STEP 5

DISCUSS THE EVALUATION WITH THE EMPLOYEE

Each employee's performance should be discussed with him from time to time so he will continue to know where his work exceeds, equals, or falls below each requirement and how he is doing as a whole. This should be done naturally as occasions arise.

WHY ARE THESE DISCUSSIONS NECESSARY?

Some supervisors think these regular discussions are unnecessary because they are talking to their people every day about their work operations. They say that they give credit for good work, take their employees to task when work isn't up to standard, and keep an "open door" for them at all times. This is as it should be, but it isn't enough.

Often employees have things on their minds that they cannot express in casual conversation. Often they feel they don't know where they stand. So it is wise to provide these special discussions with your employees *in addition* to the day-to-day exchanges of work problems.



"Joe, now that you're approaching retirement, I think it's about time to discuss your performance."

"THERE ISN'T TIME" . . .

Yes, these discussions do take time, but they usually save time in the long run. Clearing up uncertainties keeps problems from arising and growing where none need exist. A supervisor's primary job is to build and stimulate his workers—to get results through them. If he gives enough time to building his people, he should have to spend less time on troublesome day-to-day human relations problems with more, rather than less, time left for such things as materials, machines, and procedures.

"BUT THESE TALKS ARE DIFFICULT" . . .

It's true that they aren't easy. This is probably why supervisors and employees sometimes approach them with reluctance. But they are an inescapable part of your fundamental responsibility of evaluating performance. And they are not as difficult as you may anticipate. There are a number of things you can do that will help to make the discussions pretty natural.

HERE IS A CHECKLIST OF SOME TIPS . . .

Arrange a private place for the discussion.

Pick a place where your discussion will not be overheard and you won't be disturbed by telephone calls or visitors. Schedule the discussion so that you will have plenty of time to complete it. Select a time when there is no unusual stress or pressure.



✓ ***Put the employee at ease.***

Make the man physically comfortable. Be at ease yourself. Begin on some subject he likes to talk about, such as his family or his hobbies. Explain that the purpose of the discussion is to help him improve on the job.



✓ ***Mention a few of his strong points.***

Tell the employee what he does best. Such recognition will establish a good feeling. But use discretion and don't overdo it. Discuss with the employee how he might make even more use of these strong points.



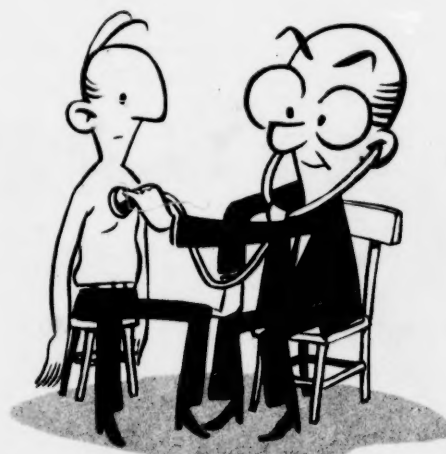
✓ *Encourage him to talk.*

There are a variety of ways you can do this. Ask questions that invite him to express himself and that will keep him talking. Turn his questions back to him to find out what he thinks. Repeat or rephrase something he has said. Above all, remember that the purpose is to talk about him—not you.



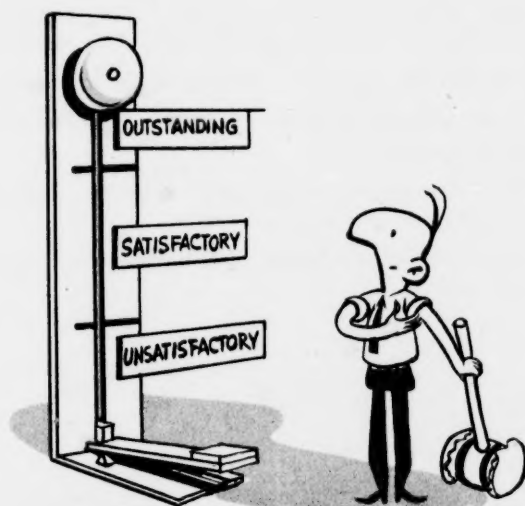
✓ *Listen.*

This, of course, goes along with encouraging the employee to talk. You can learn a lot from the employee just by listening to him and getting his point of view. He will be more ready to accept what you have to say if you listen to what he has to say. Also, notice what he doesn't say as well as what he does say.



✓ *Discuss areas where he can improve.*

The purpose of the discussion is to help the employee improve. All of us have some room for improvement, but we may not be aware of the specific areas. However, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion. Don't dwell on minor incidents, and don't argue.



✓ *Encourage the employee to develop his own program.*

Encourage him to think of ways in which he can make better use of his strong points and in which he can strengthen the areas where he needs improvement. If he attempts this, he is more likely to do something about it. Ask what you can do to help him, but remember that do-it-yourself is a good slogan here.



STEP 6 | **TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION**

Evaluating an employee's work performance is useful only to the extent to which you take action to bring about needed improvement or to use his strengths fully. In this last step, then, you might take one or more of the following actions:

- Assist the employee in carrying out the improvement program which he has developed—with your help.
- Assist the employee, through guidance, training, and encouragement, in improving performance which is below standard.
- Begin action to change the assignment of, or if nec-

essary separate, a worker whose performance remains unsatisfactory after reasonable efforts to improve it.

- Make better use of an employee's strong points by assignment of duties which take advantage of them.
- Recommend—or select—employees for promotion.
- Decide whether an employee is entitled to a within-grade increase.
- See that appropriate credit and recognition is given for high-level performance.
- Translate your evaluation into an official performance rating.

PERFORMANCE RATINGS

In the last step of taking appropriate action we mentioned "official performance ratings." A performance rating is a periodic, official summarization of a supervisor's evaluation of an employee's performance during a specified period.

Since you have been evaluating the employee's performance on a continuous basis, as we have outlined, it is very simple to make the official performance rating. You will have already completed the necessary evaluation. All you have to do is decide whether, for the specified period, the employee's performance has been . .

- ✓ SATISFACTORY
- ✓ UNSATISFACTORY
- ✓ OUTSTANDING



Let's take a look at each of these ratings . . .

SATISFACTORY RATING

For a SATISFACTORY rating, an employee's performance . . .



- Must meet or exceed the requirements of the position in all aspects which are necessary for the successful operation of the job.
- Weak performance in some aspect of the job must be offset by performance exceeding the requirement in some other aspect of equal importance.

You don't have to make a written report, nor is the rating reviewed at higher levels. However, you do have to tell the employee that he has been given a satisfactory rating.

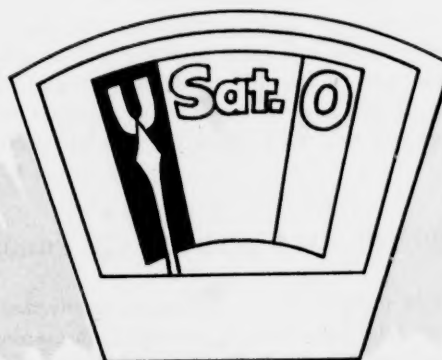
UNSATISFACTORY RATING

An employee's performance is **UNSATISFACTORY** when it fails to meet the requirements of the position in one or more aspects which are necessary for the successful operation of the job. Strong performance in one aspect doesn't automatically balance weak performance in another; the more important aspects of a job should be given greater weight.

You may recommend this rating only after your efforts to correct an employee's deficiencies have been unsuccessful. An employee who has completed his probationary or trial period may be given a rating of unsatisfactory only after a written 90-day warning notice and a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate satisfactory performance. Check with your personnel office for assistance in these cases.

These safeguards are intended to insure that this rating is carefully and deliberately weighed. You should make efforts to improve employee performance as soon as you observe inadequacies.

An unsatisfactory rating may be given only at the time of the annual rating, after the proper warning period is completed. This rating requires the approval of an official above your level, and performance requirements must be in writing.



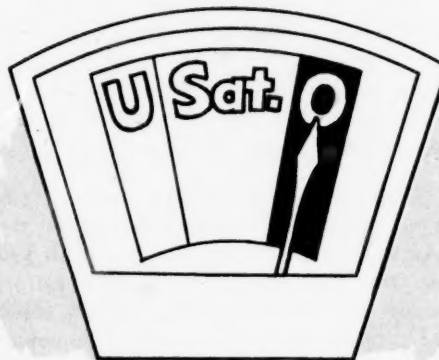
OUTSTANDING RATING

For a rating of OUTSTANDING an employee's performance must not only materially have exceeded ALL performance requirements, but have been unusual and deserving of special commendation. It need not necessarily be so in each item or detail of each requirement, but the requirement must have been met—as a whole—in an outstanding manner.

You must submit recommendations for outstanding ratings in writing. The justification will state position requirements and show how the employee's performance has materially exceeded them. Your recommendation must be approved by a higher official. The employee will be given a copy of the approved rating.

HOW DO YOU GIVE APPROPRIATE CREDIT?

In step 6 on page 22, two of the actions mentioned that you might take based on evaluation of an employee's work performance were deciding whether he is entitled to within-grade increases and giving appropriate



credit for high-level performance. Just how do you see that appropriate credit is given? There are a variety of ways.

First of all, if you have recommended that the employee be given an outstanding performance rating, the answer is simple because such a rating may be accompanied by a recommendation for a Superior Performance Award or Quality Increase.

Even where an outstanding rating is not involved or

is not approved, either of these forms of recognition may be granted. This is because the requirements are not as stringent as for outstanding ratings. The relationship between Performance Ratings, within-grade increases, and Superior Performance Awards can be pictured like this—

UNSATISFACTORY		SATISFACTORY		OUTSTANDING
Performance fails to meet requirements of the position in one or more essential aspects.		LOW—Work is barely satisfactory.	MIDDLE—Performance meets or exceeds requirements in all aspects which are essential to the successful operation of the job.	HIGH—Work approaches outstanding. Performance is outstanding in ALL significant aspects of the job.
Work is NOT of an "Acceptable Level of Competence."		Work IS of "Acceptable Level of Competence."		Work MAY Merit Some Form of Recognition.
An employee whose work falls in this range is not entitled to a within-grade increase.		Employee is entitled to regular within-grade increase.		<u>QUALITY INCREASE.</u> Employee is not only entitled to regular within-grade increase, but may be considered for an additional one for high-quality performance.

OR

SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE AWARD.

A lump sum cash award may be given where the performance falls in this range. Employee's performance in two or more aspects of his job is sufficiently beyond normal expectations so that an award is well deserved.

DON'T FORGET OTHER TYPES OF AWARDS

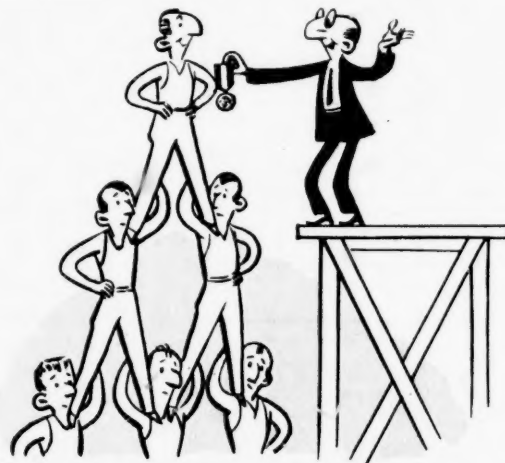
You can also consider HONOR AWARDS and awards for SPECIAL ACTS OR SERVICES. VA Manual MP-5, part I, chapter 451, Employee Recognition and Incentives, gives further details on all these forms of recognition.

DON'T FORGET THE GROUP

We have been considering the individual, but he is part of a group. It may be that the performance of the group, rather than one member, merits recognition. This is true when group performance exceeds normal standards, when each individual's performance depends on the performance of other employees, and when each employee has contributed to the achievement. Each of the awards mentioned above may be given to groups, as well as individuals.

For the longrun accomplishment of the station's mission the recognition of significantly productive groups will encourage the "team spirit" essential to effective organization. You should be on the alert for work

units whose output is consistently above average and whose team contributions exceed normal expectations. Recognizing this will provide stimulus to other units of the station.



"I award you this medal for your magnificent individual achievement."

A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION

- **DON'T FORGET INFORMAL RECOGNITION**

We have been discussing formal recognition for performance, but emphasis on sustained performance of high quality is needed whether awards are involved or not. Don't forget that supervisory approval is often more important than formal awards in certain situations and with certain types of employees. For example, you could give the employee a memorandum and send a copy to his personnel folder when his performance, though not justifying an outstanding rating or an award, justifies such recognition. Still more informal is the pat-on-the-back or the word of appreciation for a project well done.

- **REMEMBER THAT THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR HUMAN JUDGMENT**

It is important that recognition of performance be given on a fair and equitable basis. Favorable recognition given when it is not earned can lower an employee's pride in his work and cause him to lose his respect for himself and for you. It not only cheapens the value of the recognition but, in some instances, it can cost the Government money through giving awards which are not merited. On the other hand, when recognition is not given where it is deserved, employees become discouraged and lose their incentive to do a better job.

There are some general guidelines for achieving a balance between these two extremes. For example, for superior performance awards the minimum required level should not be so high as to be unattainable by employees who are generally recognized as performing in a superior manner, nor so low that awards lose their significance by being easily obtainable. However, there are no precise rules. It is largely a matter of judgment—*your judgment* as a supervisor.

Whatever the recognition may be, it should be considered appropriate by the employee and his fellow workers. Maximum benefit depends on the fitness in time and place and on the extent of the recognition accorded.

- **DON'T OVERLOOK OTHER MOTIVATIONS**

Good supervision and opportunity for participation in decision-making are probably more vital than awards in stimulating the will to work. Most important of all is the work itself—the pride that comes from identification with a worthwhile cause, a good product, or a task well done. Liberal use of awards cannot take the place of efforts to develop satisfaction in the work being performed. Awards are tools which are available to you when they will be useful. They are not the only or even the primary means for motivating workers.

HOW DOES ALL THIS ADD UP?

Evaluating the performance of employees and giving appropriate recognition, when merited, in a fair and equitable manner is essential for effective supervision.

It is also—don't wince—YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A SUPERVISOR. We have suggested certain principles and guidelines. The most important thing is to apply them systematically in your day-to-day working relations with your employees. This will not add to your already numerous burdens. In fact, it will—



- Enable you to do your job more effectively;
- Develop greater pride in work accomplishment;
- Result in more productive and better motivated employees;
- Produce a more effective and more efficient "shop."
- And thereby,
- Help you to do your job more easily; and
- Contribute to the accomplishment of your station's mission.